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RECPT #

Record

12 September 1986
OCA 86-3079

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD:

SUBJECT: Commercialization of Landsat Photography/ Meeting
With Various Components of DI on Imagery Exploitation

1. In response to a question by the DCI on what should be done about media disclosures of intelligence-related information derived from civil satellite imagery, a meeting of the Task Group on Civil Imaging was held on 9 September 1986. Various representatives of the imagery exploitation components of the DI were present in addition to the undersigned. []

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2. Discussion immediately focused on the nature and scope of the disclosure threat. The issue was thoroughly aired and a consensus held that we have had commercial satellite photography available for a decade and there, in fact, has been no serious threat. The French SPOT satellite has been selling its photography product for four years without posing a serious disclosure threat. Moreover, it was concluded that disclosure concerns were exaggerated and speculative. []

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3. At present the highest resolution in commercial satellites is about [] Would our reaction be the same if the technology advanced to a resolution of [] All agreed that the availability of this technology for commercial use was years away and therefore not an immediate threat. Furthermore it was readily agreed that, if the U.S. limited the commercial availability of high resolution technology, the Japanese or the French, over whom we have no control, will fill the gap. []

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4. Debate then centered on what is the projected reaction of other countries having their sensitive installations disclosed by commercial satellites. For example, it has been rumored that the Soviet Union believes that China does not know the number of Soviet troops deployed along the China border. China could task SPOT to find out. Would Russia consider jamming or downing the commercial satellite? Since the answer to this question is speculative it has been left to a meeting of the task group to be convened later this year. []

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5. Congress is strongly in favor of satellite commercialization as evidenced by the annual subsidies for Landsat growth and development. In addition, Congress and the Administration have consistently supported "open skies" treaties, making the open space of all signatory countries available to commercial satellites.

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Legislation Division
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